

Lesotho

Lesotho (le-soo-too) is called Southern Africa's 'kingdom in the sky' for good reason. This stunningly beautiful, mountainous country is nestled island-like in the middle of South Africa and it is a fascinating travel detour from its larger neighbour. The country offers superb mountain scenery, a proud traditional people, endless hiking trails, and the chance to explore remote areas on Basotho ponies.

The 'lowland' areas (all of which are still above 1000m) offer some craft shopping and dinosaur footsteps, while the highlands in the northeast and centre feature towering peaks (over 3000m) and verdant valleys.

Lesotho came into being during the early 19th century, when both the *difaqane* (forced migration) and Boer incursions into the hinterlands were at their height. Under the leadership of the legendary king Moshoeshoe the Great, the Basotho people sought sanctuary and strategic advantage amid the forbidding terrain of the Drakensberg and Maluti Ranges. The small nation they forged continues to be an intriguing anomaly in a sea of modernity.

Getting around is reasonably easy – ordinary hire cars will get you most places; public transport is extensive, albeit slow. Hiking or pony trekking from village to village are the best ways of exploring.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 30,350 sq km
- **ATMs** Only in Maseru
- **Borders** South Africa (Lesotho is surrounded by South Africa)
- **Budget** US\$25 to US\$45 a day
- **Capital** Maseru
- **Languages** South Sotho (Sesotho) & English
- **Money** Maloti; US\$1 = M7.4
- **Population** 2.1 million
- **Seasons** winter/dry (June–August), summer (December–February), rainy (October–April)
- **Telephone** Country code 266; international access code 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC + 2
- **Visa** Free two-week entry permit on arrival for most nationalities



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Semonkong** (p871) and **Malealea** (p872) Explore rugged, mountainous regions with breathtaking scenery and traditional Basotho villages.
- **Thaba-Bosiu** (p871) Discover the mountain stronghold of King Moshoeshoe the Great, where the struggle for Lesotho was won.
- **Mokhotlong** (p874) Experience remote Lesotho, where you can step back into an older, more traditional Africa.
- **Sehlabathebe National Park** (p873) Revel in the splendid isolation of this national park.
- **Sani Top** (p874) Enjoy high and stunning vistas from atop the Sani Pass.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Lesotho's climate is a mixture of temperate and sub-tropical influences, with surprising extremes of temperature ranging from January minimum temperatures, which can drop five degrees below freezing, up to July maximums of over 32°C. The best time to visit is in late April to May, when summer temperatures are yet to arrive but visibility is high after the rains. September to early October is another good time.

ITINERARIES

- **One Week** From Maseru (p869), head south to Morija (p872) where you'll find Morija Museum & Archives (p872), a great museum with Basotho culture displays. Continue to Malealea (p872) or Semonkong (p871) – the 'gems' of Lesotho – to go pony trekking. If you have time, head to Quthing (p873) to check out the 180 million-year-old dinosaur footprints.
- **Two Weeks** Visit Teyateyaneng (p875), the craft centre of Lesotho or slightly further north, Bokong Nature Reserve (p874). Get a taste of the mountainous 'lowlands' by heading to Morija (p872), Malealea (p872) (or Semonkong; p871) and Quthing (p873) and continue northeast to the remote Sehlabathebe National Park (p873).
- **One month** Take in some of the country's most impressive scenery on a clockwise circuit to Mokhotlong (p874) and up to the magnificent Sani Top (p874), visiting Leribe (p875) along the way. Re-

HOW MUCH?

- **Traditional dance/cultural group** US\$4.50-22
- **Internet** US\$0.10-0.20 per minute
- **Coffee** US\$0.35-1.20
- **Banana** US\$0.15
- **Genuine (wool) Basotho blanket** US\$60

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** \$0.90
- **1L bottled water** US\$0.80-1
- **Bottle of beer** US\$1
- **Souvenir T-shirt** US\$4.50-9
- **Bag of fried savoury donuts** US\$0.30

turn to Maseru (p869) via Likalaneng and Roma (p871), before heading east to Morija (p872) and following the two-week itinerary. Note: the road between Sehlabathebe in the east and Sehonghong in the northeast requires a 4WD.

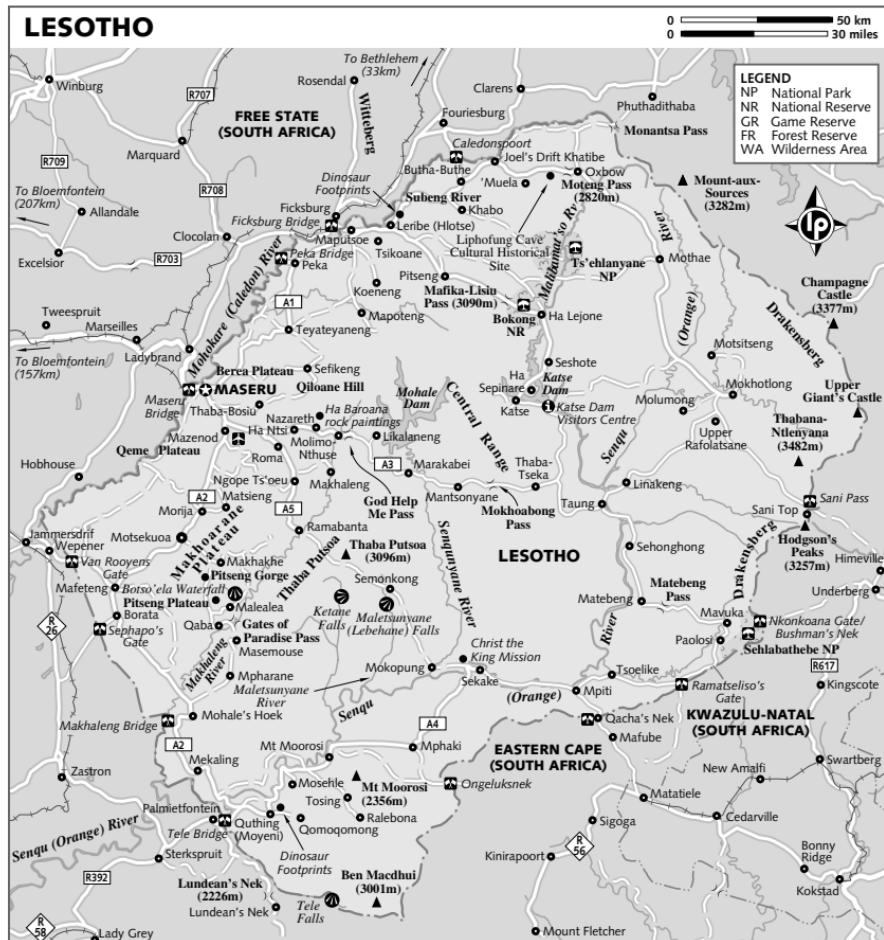
HISTORY

Neighbouring South Africa has always cast a long shadow over Lesotho, fuelling a perpetual struggle for a separate identity on an ever-diminishing patch of territory.

The first inhabitants of the mountainous region that makes up present-day Lesotho were the hunter-gatherer people known as the Khoisan. They have left many examples of their rock art in the river valleys. Lesotho was settled by the Sotho peoples in the 16th century.

Moshoeshoe the Great

King Moshoeshoe (pronounced 'mo-shwe-shwe' or 'moshesh') is the father figure of Lesotho's history. He began life as a local chief of a small village. Around 1820 he led his villagers to Butha-Buthe, a mountain stronghold, where they survived the first battles of the *difaqane* (forced migration), caused by the violent expansion of the nearby Zulu state. The loosely organised southern Sotho society managed to survive due largely to the adept political and diplomatic abilities of the king. In 1824 Moshoeshoe moved his people to



Thaba-Bosiu, a mountaintop that was even easier to defend.

From Thaba-Bosiu, Moshoeshoe played a patient game of placating the stronger local rulers and granting protection, as well as land and cattle, to refugees. These people and others like them were to form Basutholand; at the time of Moshoeshoe's death in 1870, it had a population of more than 150,000.

As the *difaqane* receded a new threat arose. The Voortrekkers (Boer pioneers) had crossed the Senqu (Orange) River in the 1830s and established the Orange Free State. By 1843 Moshoeshoe was sufficiently concerned by their numbers to ally himself with the British Cape Colony government. The British Resi-

dent in Basutholand decided that Moshoeshoe was becoming too powerful and engineered an unsuccessful attack on his kingdom.

Treaties with the British helped define the borders of Basutholand but did little to stop squabbles with the Boers. The Boers pressed their claims on the land and increasing tension led to wars between the Orange Free State and the Basotho people in 1858 and 1865. Though he achieved success in the first war, Moshoeshoe was forced in the second to sign away much of his western lowlands.

The Road to Independence

The continual war between the Orange Free State and Basutholand was not good for British interests, and in 1868 the British govern-

ment annexed Basutholand and handed it to the Cape Colony to run in 1871. After a period of instability, the British government again took direct control of Basutholand in 1884, although it remained easier to give effective authority to local leaders than rule through British officers.

Lesotho's existence is attributable to a quirk of history and fortuitous timing. In the 1880s, direct British rule was deeply resented by the local population as an infringement on Basutholand's freedom and sovereignty. Little were they to know that British occupation would secure the future independence of Lesotho as other kingdoms fell under the South African umbrella. All because at the precise moment when the Union of South Africa was created, Basutholand was a British Protectorate and was not included in the Union.

In 1910 the advisory Basutholand National Council was formed from members nominated by the chiefs. In the mid-1950s the council requested internal self-government from the British; by 1960 a new constitution was in place and elections were held for a legislative council. The main contenders were the Basutholand Congress Party (BCP), similar to South Africa's African National Congress (ANC), and the conservative Basutholand National Party (BNP) headed by Chief Leabua Jonathan.

The BCP won the 1960 elections and demanded full independence from Britain. This was eventually agreed to; independence came into effect in 1966. However, at the elections in 1965 the BCP lost to the BNP and Chief Jonathan became the first prime minister of the new Kingdom of Lesotho which allied itself with the apartheid regime across the border.

Big Brother

Stripping King Moshoeshoe II of the few powers that the new constitution had left him did not endear Jonathan's government to the people and the BCP won the 1970 election. After his defeat, Jonathan followed the example of many bad losers in African history by suspending the constitution, expelling the king and banning all opposition political parties. Jonathan changed tack, distancing himself from South Africa and calling for the return of land in the Orange Free State that had been stolen from the original Basutholand. He also offered refuge to ANC guerrillas and flirted

with Cuba. South Africa closed Lesotho's borders, strangling the country.

Jonathan was deposed in 1986 and the king was restored as head of state. This was a popular move, but eventually agitation for democratic reform rose again. In 1990 King Moshoeshoe II was deposed by the army in favour of his son, Prince Mohato Bereng Seeisa (Letsoe III). Elections in 1993 resulted in the return of the BCP.

In 1995 Letsoe III abdicated in favour of his father. Five years after being deposed, Moshoeshoe II was reinstated, restoring calm to Lesotho after a year of unrest. Less than a year later he was killed when his 4WD plunged over a cliff in the Maluti Mountains. Letsoe III became king for the second time.

A split in the BCP saw the breakaway Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) take power. Elections were held in 1998 amid accusations of widespread cheating by the LCD, which won by a landslide. Tensions between the public service and the government became acute, and the military was also split over the result.

Following months of protests, the government appeared to be losing control. In late September 1998 it called on the Southern African Development Community (SADC) treaty partners, Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe, to help restore order. Troops, mainly South African, invaded the kingdom. Rebel elements of the Lesotho army put up strong resistance and there was heavy fighting in Maseru.

The government agreed to call new elections, but the political situation remained tense with the spectre of South African intervention never far away. Political wrangling delayed the elections until May 2002. The LCD won again and Prime Minister Mosisili began a second – and peaceful – five-year term.

Lesotho Today

Lesotho ranks among the region's poorer countries, and has few natural resources other than water and gem diamonds. During the last century the country's main export was labour – approximately 60% of males worked, mainly in mining, in South Africa. In the late 1990s, the restructuring of the South African gold-mining industry, mechanisation and the closure of some mines resulted in huge employment losses. Meanwhile, the Lesotho

economy – under transformation due to a rapid growth of the textile industry – also collapsed as a result of Chinese competition and changes to international agreements. Meanwhile, the spectre of AIDS is high – the infection rate (adult prevalence) is estimated at a massive 30%.

The elections of 2007 bring challenges of another kind – whether to back Mosisili for a third term, whether corruption is being tackled vigorously enough, and whether grassroots concerns are being neglected in favour of a more gentrified party.

CULTURE

The proud Basotho are remarkably free of the effects of apartheid. Traditional Basotho culture is central to the local people. It focuses on a belief in the power of ancestral spirits, and includes customs, rites and superstitions. The community chief is a respected and revered position, and family is an important social unit. Music plays an important part in the lives of the Basotho, but education is not compulsory.

Cattle occupy an important role in traditional culture with cattle ownership being a critical indicator of wealth and status. Shepherds, once a revered position, are today among the poorest males. The Basotho blanket, worn proudly by many in the rural areas, reflects one's status in the community, according to the quality, material and design of the blanket itself.

Most Basothos in rural communities live in *rondavels*, round huts with mud walls (often decorated) and thatched roofs.

Poverty and death are ever present in Lesotho. Life for most people is incredibly harsh, and most try to eke out a living on the land or through subsistence agriculture, especially livestock; unemployment rates currently stand at about 45%.

PEOPLE

The citizens of Lesotho are known as the Basotho people. Most are southern Sotho and most speak Sesotho (South Sotho). The melding of the Basotho nation was largely the result of Moshoeshoe the Great's 19th-century military and diplomatic triumphs; many diverse subgroups and peoples have somehow managed to merge into a homogeneous society. Maseru, with 175,000 people, is the largest town.

Around 80% of the population is believed to be Christian (mainly Roman Catholic, Anglican and Episcopal). The remaining 20% live by traditional Basotho beliefs. There are many churches throughout the country, many of which were (and continue to be) built by missionaries.

ARTS & CRAFTS

Good-quality tapestry and rug weaving is practised around the country, especially near Teyateyaneng and on the fringes of Maseru. Basotho hat baskets and grass and clay products can also be found.

ENVIRONMENT

Lesotho's western border is formed by the Mohokare (Caledon) River. The eastern border is the rugged Drakensberg Range, and high country defines much of the southern border. In fact, all of Lesotho is over 1000m in altitude, with peaks reaching 3000m in the centre and east of the country.

There are serious environmental concerns about the controversial Highlands Water Project, a series of dams on the Senqu (Orange) River in Lesotho, which provides water and electricity to South Africa and income to Lesotho. So far, two Dams – the Katse and Mohale – have been completed. Several communities have been disrupted (though compensation has been given) and some of the country's most fertile land has been flooded; it's already in short supply as only 10% is suitable for agriculture. There are also the as-yet-unknown effects on the ecology of the Senqu River. Ironically, many people, especially in the drought-ridden lowlands do not have easy access to water.

Other current key environmental issues include overgrazing and soil erosion. The 19th-century agricultural practices created instability in the duplex soils. Subsequent grazing and heavy summer storms then disturbed the topsoil, resulting in dongas, massive eroded gullies, seen throughout Lesotho. Unless serious attention is paid to the problem, much of Lesotho's land will be uncultivable.

FOOD & DRINK

You won't be writing home about the food in Lesotho. It's not notably bad, but nothing special either. The staples here include maize (often in the form of mealie pap, maize por-

ridge), as well as some vegetables and pulses. Maseru boasts a decent selection of restaurants serving a range of local and foreign foods, but outside the capital, you'll usually have to take what you're given.

MASERU

pop 175,000

For much of its history, Maseru has been a quiet backwater, and if you're coming from Johannesburg (Jo'burg), you might think that it still is. However, over the past three decades, Maseru has rapidly expanded, and boasts a modest array of amenities. Among its attractions: a temperate climate, well-stocked shops, a decent selection of restaurants and hotels, and personable, peppy people. Kingsway, the city's main thoroughfare, was paved for the 1947 visit by the British royal family, and for many years remained the country's only nondirt road. A major rebuilding program has hidden many of the once-visible scars of the 1998 political unrest.

ORIENTATION

Most places to eat and shop are on or near Kingsway, while accommodation is slightly further out of the centre. Kingsway runs from the border post at Maseru Bridge right through the centre of town to the Circle, a traffic roundabout and landmark. At the Circle the street splits to become two important, though rather unimaginatively named, highways: Main North Rd and Main South Rd. A bypass road rims the city to the south. Moshoeshoe International Airport is 21km from town, off Main South Rd. A taxi to Maseru costs around US\$7.

INFORMATION

The top-end hotels will change currency (at poor rates). The main banks are all on Kingsway; Standard Bank has an ATM. The main post office is on Kingsway.

Department of Land, Surveys & Physical Planning (Lerotholi Rd; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri) Sells a good 1:250,000 topographical map of Lesotho (US\$7), plus hiking maps (US\$5) covering the country.

Queen Elizabeth II Hospital (☎ 2231 2501) On Kingsway.

Tourist Information Office (☎ 2231 2427; touristinfo@ltdc.org.ls; Kingsway; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5pm Sat) In the Basotho Shield building, op-

posite the giant Basotho Hat building. Friendly staff keep lists of everything, including accommodation options.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Maseru is fairly safe but muggings and crime are on the increase. Always take a taxi at night.

SIGHTS

Maseru is short on sights but big on personality. There is an impressive **Catholic cathedral** near the Circle at the end of Kingsway. The other main attractions are the tourist office and its shops, useful for stocking up on necessities. Many sights, such as Thaba Bosiu and craft shops, are easily accessible from the capital, however.

SLEEPING

Anglican Centre (☎ 2232 2046; dm/tw US\$6/12) Maseru's only budget option has clean, austere rooms; meals are available if you give notice. The centre is about 500m north of Kingsway on the bend where Assisi Rd becomes Lancer's Rd.

Foothills Guesthouse (☎ 5870 6566; melvin@xsinet.co.za; 121 Maluti Rd; s/d US\$41/62) This converted sandstone house has large and airy rooms with décor c 1960s, and a pleasant enclosed veranda for breakfasts.

Lancer's Inn (☎ 2231 2114; lancers-inn@ilesotho.com; cnr Kingsway & Pioneer Rd; s/d/tr US\$66/79/96; ☎) A comfortable colonial-era hotel just off Kingsway – best to book ahead.

For glitzier options try either **Maseru Sun** (☎ 2231 2434; maseru@sunint.co.za; 12 Orpen Rd; r US\$130; ☎ ☎) or **Lesotho Sun** (☎ 2231 3111; lesoresv@sunint.co.za; r US\$134; ☎ ☎ ☎).

EATING & DRINKING

Good Times Cafe (2231 7705; Level 1, LNDC Mall; US\$2.50-7; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) 'It' for the 'it' crowd, with funky suede sofas, mood lighting, and oh-so-shiny chrome trimmings.

Rendezvous (☎ 2231 2114; Lancer's Inn, cnr Kingsway & Pioneer Rd; mains US\$5-10; ☎ lunch & dinner) A fave among the expats and locals, who gossip in the garden café and traditional chandeliered restaurant.

On the eastern end of Kingsway towards the minibus stations are **street stalls** (meals about US\$1.50; ☎ lunch) selling grilled snacks and curries. Shoprite is the best option for self-caterers. Next to Lancer's Inn is a good **bakery** (☎ 7am-8.30pm).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus and minibuses depart from the Pitso Ground (and nearby streets) to the north-east of the Circle. From Maseru, destinations include Mafeteng (US\$2), Quthing (US\$7; change at Mafeteng), Roma (US\$1.10) and Mohale's Hoek (US\$2).

GETTING AROUND

Taxi & Minibus Taxi

The standard minibus taxi fare around town is US\$0.40. Taxi companies include **Moonlite** (✉ 2231 2605), **Planet** (✉ 2231 7777) and **Luxury** (✉ 2232 6211) – also available for long-distance charter. There are taxi stands on Main North Rd and Kingsway.

AROUND MASERU

THABA-BOSIU

Moshoeshoe the Great's mountain stronghold, first occupied in July 1824, is about 25km east of Maseru. Thaba-Bosiu (Mountain at Night) played a pivotal role in the consolidation of the Basotho nation. Legend suggests that Thaba-Bosiu, a hill in daylight, grows into an unconquerable mountain at night.

The **visitors' information centre** (admission US\$0.70; ✉ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) can arrange official guides (make sure it's done through the centre, and pay a tip).

There are great views of the **Qiloane Hill** (inspiration for the Basotho hat), along with the remains of fortifications, Moshoeshoe's grave, and parts of the original settlement.

Mmelesi Lodge (✉ 5250 0006; s/d US\$30/34.50) offers well-organised flowery rondavels and a dining room; it is 2km before the visitors' information centre.

SOUTHERN LESOTHO

ROMA

Getting to Roma is half the fun, reached as it is through a spectacular gorge south of town. After that there's not a lot to do, but this relaxing place features attractive sandstone buildings and, as a university town, it's a good place to meet students.

The Ha Baroana rock paintings, which are definitely worth seeing only if you've got time, are just north of Roma. They're suffering from neglect and vandalism (including

damage done by tourists who spray water on the paintings to produce brighter photos). The dinosaur footprints leave an impression; ask at the Trading Post Guest House for directions.

The **Trading Post Guest House** (✉ 2234 0202/67; www.tradingpost.co.za; camp sites per person US\$7, dm US\$11, rondavels per person US\$24, s/d without bathroom US\$21/42; ) is a lovely, relaxing place located 2km west of Roma off the Maseru road. The owners also operate the nearby Trading Post Adventures, offering more accommodation, as well as tours, hiking trails and horse rides. There's no restaurant (try the Speakeasy or Kaycees Restaurants in Roma), but you can use the guest house kitchen or arrange meals (US\$5 to US\$9).

Minibus taxis run throughout the day between Maseru and Roma (US\$1.50, 30 minutes).

If you want to visit the rock paintings on a day-trip from Maseru, take a minibus taxi until 1.5km before Nazareth. A signpost indicates the way off to the left to the paintings. Follow the gravel track 3km to the village of Ha Khotso, then turn right at a football field. Follow this track a further 2.5km to a hilltop overlooking a gorge. A footpath zigzags down the hillside to the paintings inside a rock shelter.

To get to the paintings from Roma, head back to the Maseru road and turn right onto the road to Thaba-Tseka. After about 12km turn off to the left, just after the Ha Ntsi settlement on the Mohlaka-oa-Tuka River.

SEMONKONG

This place is as beautiful as its name. The Maletsunyane Falls are a 90-minute walk from Semonkong (Place of Smoke). They are more than 200m high and are at their most spectacular in summer. They are best appreciated from the bottom of the gorge (where there are camp sites for US\$3). For a thrilling descent, you can abseil (per person one/two/three or more people US\$63/55/50).

The remote 122m-high Ketane Falls are also worth seeing. The falls are a solid day's ride (30km) from Semonkong, or a four-day return horse ride from Malealea Lodge (see p872).

The enchanting **Semonkong Lodge** (✉ in South Africa 051-933 3106; www.placeofsmoke.co.ls; camp sites per person US\$5.50, dm/s/d US\$11/32/59) offers hiking and pony trekking.

Buses between Maseru and Semonkong (US\$3.50) leave both places in the morning and arrive late in the afternoon.

MORIJA

Morija is a tiny town with a big history. **Morija Museum & Archives** (✉ 2236 0308; www.morijafest.com; admission US\$0.80; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun), the best museum in Lesotho thanks to curator Stephen Gill, has Basotho exhibits and archives. It also hosts the **Morija Arts & Cultural Festival** (www.morijafest.com). Near the museum is the **Mophato Oa Morija** (✉ 2236 0308; camp sites per person US\$3.25, dm US\$5.20), an ecumenical centre that is sometimes willing to accommodate travellers. The comfortable **Morija Guest Houses** (✉ 6306 5093; mgh@leo.co.ls; r per person US\$25) have stunning views.

Minibus taxis run between Maseru and Morija (US\$1.50, 45 minutes, 40km).

MALEALEA

Set in truly stunning scenery, the village of Malealea, with its mountains and valleys, is one of Lesotho's gems. The best way to experience the spectacular landscape is to take

a pony trek or wander on foot through the hills and villages – the Pitseng Plateau, the Botso'ela Waterfall, and the Pitseng Gorge (take your swimwear) – are popular destinations. Even for the less energetic, Malealea is a wonderful place to stay. Ancient **San paintings** hidden in rock shelters can still be seen.

Malealea Lodge (✉ in South Africa 051-436 6766, 082-552 4215; www.malealea.com; camp sites per person US\$7, backpacker huts without bathroom per person US\$11, r per person US\$14-28) was part of the original Malealea Trading Store established way back in 1905. It now mainly caters for visitors, and is a very friendly, well-run place. As well as comfortable rooms and a neat camp site, meals (breakfast US\$5.50, lunch US\$7 and dinner US\$10) are available, with prior notice. There are also self-catering facilities and a small village shop with basic supplies. Maps and walks of the areas are available too.

Two Sprinter minibus taxis depart Maseru at around 11.30am and 4.30pm, and Malealea at 6am and 2pm (US\$5.50, 2½ hours, 83km). Or you can catch a minibus to Motsekoua (US\$2, two hours), and from there another to Malealea (US\$1.50, 30 minutes).

ACTIVITIES ON HIGH

Pony Trekking

Lesotho's tough and sure-footed little Basotho ponies can take you to some remote and awesome places in the highlands. The main pony centres are Semonkong Lodge (p871), Malealea Lodge (above) and Trading Post Guest House (p871). In some cases, the villagers provide the ponies and act as guides; this provides a significant contribution to the local-village economy. At Malealea, pony trek prices start at US\$18 per day. Overnight rides start at US\$23 per person, plus US\$4.50 for each night spent in one of the Basotho village huts.

Walking

Lesotho's high country offers some of the most spectacular walking in Southern Africa. The crest of the Drakensberg Range (actually an escarpment, with the Lesotho plateau on the west, and the sheer drop down to South Africa on the east) is one of the most popular areas for serious hikers, but remote treks are also possible in many other areas. In the south and east the rugged mountains are all but deserted – this makes for long treks and a great wilderness experience in a landscape reminiscent of the Tibetan plateau. Only experienced walkers should cover this area, and in a party of at least three people. For details on walks see *A Backpackers Guide to Lesotho*, by Russell Suchet, available locally and in South Africa for US\$6.50.

Hikers should note the local etiquette: respect the mounds of stones (cairns) that mark graves. However, a mound of stones near a trail, especially between two hills, should be added to by passing travellers, who ensure their good luck by spitting on a stone and throwing it onto the pile. Note that a white flag waving from a village means that *joala* (sorghum beer) has just been brewed; a yellow flag indicates maize beer, red is for meat and green for vegetables.

For camping in or near a village, always ask permission from the village chief, and offer to pay a small fee.

QUTHING

Quthing, the southernmost town in Lesotho, is often known as Moyeni (Place of the Wind). The town was established in 1877, abandoned three years later and then rebuilt at the present site.

The town comprises Lower Quthing and Upper Quthing, the former colonial administrative centre, with good facilities and views overlooking the dramatic Senqu (Orange) River gorge. There are minibus taxis between Lower and Upper Quthing (US\$0.40).

Off the highway, about 5km west of Quthing, is the **Masitise Cave House Museum** (✉ 5879 4167; admission free, donation appreciated), a mission building built into a San rock shelter in 1866 by Reverend Ellenberger. Inquire at the house next to the small church about access to the cave house. There are San paintings nearby.

Probably the most easily located of the dinosaur footprints in Lesotho are close to Quthing and are believed to be 180 million years old. To get to them, go up the Mt Moorosi road from Quthing until you reach the pink office and prints.

Between Quthing and Masitise there is a striking twin-spired sandstone church, part of the **Villa Maria Mission**.

At Qomoqomong, 10km from Quthing, there's a good gallery of **San paintings**; ask at the General Dealers store about a guide for the 20-minute walk to the paintings.

Fuleng Guest House (✉ 2275 0260; r per person from US\$11) is the place for *rondavels-with-a-view* and a friendly local experience. **Moorosi Chalets** (✉ in South Africa 051-436 6766, 082-552 4215; www.malealea.co.ls; per person US\$11-42) is part of a community program with awesome activities, from village stays to fishing. It is near Quthing, and 6km from Mt Moorosi village. Take the turn-off to Ha Moqalo 2km out of the village towards Qacha's Nek.

Minibus taxis run daily between Quthing and Maseru (US\$7, 3½ hours) and Qacha's Nek (US\$6, three hours).

EASTERN LESOTHO

QACHA'S NEK

This pleasant border town was founded in 1888 near the pass (1980m) of the same name. It has an attractive church, several colonial-era sandstone buildings and California redwood trees, some over 25m high.

The best choice to stay is **Letloepelodge** (✉ 2295 0383; www.letloepelodge.co.ls; dm/s/d US\$10/39/55), a 'palace just below the clouds' with a peaceful outlook, or the modest **Anna's B&B** (✉ 2295 0374; annasb&b@leo.col.ls; s US\$14-42, d US\$25-39).

Minibus taxis go from Qacha's Nek and Maseru via Quthing (US\$13, six hours). An early morning bus runs between Maseru and Qacha's Nek (US\$9, nine hours), and the bus from Qacha's Nek to Sehlabathebe National Park departs around noon (US\$4.50, five hours).

SEHLABATHEBE NATIONAL PARK

Lesotho's first national park is remote and rugged – this sense of separation from the rest of the world is the main attraction. There are relatively few animals other than the rare Maloti minnow (thought to be extinct, but rediscovered in the Tsoelikana River), rare birds such as the bearded vulture, and the odd reebok or baboon.

Hiking (and horse riding from Sani Top or the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg) is the main way to explore the waterfalls and surrounding areas.

This is a summer rainfall area and thick mist is common. Winters are clear but cold at night, and there are sometimes light falls of snow.

For bookings contact the **National Environment Secretariat** (✉ 2231 1767, 2232 6075). Park management seems to change quite regularly, however.

Sleeping

You can camp in the park but there are no facilities except at **Sehlabathebe Lodge** (✉ 2231 1767; camp sites per person US\$4.50, r per person US\$11). You can buy firewood and coal here, but bring your own food. It's 12km to the lodge from the entrance and a 4WD is usually required; you can arrange to leave your car at the police station at Paolosi village.

Range Management Education Centre (dm US\$5), 2km down the road to the left after the Ma-vuka Primary School, has dorm beds, but at the time of research had no water or gas.

Getting There & Away

If you're in Lesotho, the usual way to reach the park is from Qacha's Nek, about 100km by road southwest of the park. A daily bus (US\$4.50, five hours) runs between Qacha's Nek and Sehlabathebe village; it departs

Qacha's Nek at noon and Sehlabathebe at 5.30am.

If you're in South Africa, the simplest way to reach Sehlabathebe National Park is to hike the 10km up the escarpment from the settlement of Bushman's Nek, which is about 40km by road from Underberg. From Bushman's Nek to Nkonkoana Gate, the park boundary and the Lesotho border crossing, takes about six hours. Horses can also be arranged through **Khotso Trails** (✉ in South Africa 033-701 1502; www.khotsotrails.co.za) in Underberg.

SANI TOP

Sani Top sits atop the steep Sani Pass, the only dependable road into Lesotho through the Drakensberg range in KwaZulu-Natal. This astoundingly rocky, winding and steep (with 30° gradients!) road carves its way in a truly stunning fashion, offering stupendous views on clear days and unlimited hiking possibilities. These include **Hodgson's Peaks**, 6km south, from where you get views over Sehlabathebe National Park and down to KwaZulu-Natal, and the long and strenuous hike to **Thabana-Ntlenyana** (3482m), the highest peak in Southern Africa. There's a path, but a guide is advisable. Horses can also do the trip for a small fee.

Sani Top Chalet (✉ in South Africa 033-702 1158; www.sanitopchalet.co.za; camp sites per person US\$7, dm US\$14, r without bathroom US\$42, rondavels per person US\$53) is perched dramatically at the top of the pass with a wonderful ski-chalet-type atmosphere, including a busy bar. There's less lofty praise for the backpackers' dorm; its interiors need attention, while draughts and stains detract from an otherwise high. In winter the snow is often deep enough to ski, and horse trekking is available. By the time you read this, several new rondavels should be functioning.

For details to reach Sani Top from KwaZulu-Natal, see p1015. To reach the top of Sani Pass from Mokhotlong or anywhere in Lesotho by public transport takes patience. A minibus taxi runs daily from Mokhotlong via Sani Top down to Underberg (South Africa) and back (US\$9, five hours). For hitching up or down, weekends are best.

MOKHOTLONG

Remote Mokhotlong (Place of the Bald Ibis) is 270km from Maseru and the first major town north of Sani Pass. It has an appeal-

ing Wild West feel to it, with locals on their horses and wrapped in Basotho blankets, and basic shops.

A worthwhile effort is **Molumong Guest-house & Backpackers** (✉ in South Africa 033-394 3072; molumong@worldonline.co.za; camp sites per person M45, dm/d US\$10/25), a rustic lodge and former colonial trading post, about 15km southwest of Mokhotlong. It's a basic (electricity-free) self-catering stay; bring your own food. Pony trekking is available.

A bus goes daily to/from Maseru, departing in each direction by about 8am (M50, eight hours), except on Sunday (Mokhotlong to Maseru only) and Saturday (Maseru to Mokhotlong only). There's also a daily minibus taxi from Mokhotlong to Sani Top, which continues on to Underberg (South Africa) via the Sani Pass. Minibus taxis to Linakaneng on the Thaba-Tseka road will drop you near Molumong Lodge.

In town, there's **Sengu Hotel** (✉ 2292 0330; www.sengu.co.za; with/without bathroom US\$25/28, d US\$33/39), or nearby **Grow** (✉ 2292 0205; dm US\$7) has basic dorms.

Twelve kilometres south of Mokhotlong on the road to Thaba-Tseka you'll find the **St James Lodge** (✉ 033-326 1601; stjamesguestlodge@yahoo.com; dm/d US\$10.50/13), located in an old stone building on a working mission. It's self-catering and offers pony trekking and scenic walks.

BOKONG NATURE RESERVE

Bokong Nature Reserve has perhaps the most dramatic setting of the three LHDA reserves, with stunning vistas over the Lepaqoa Valley from the **visitors centre** (adult/child US\$0.70/0.50; ✉ 8am-5pm) and various short walks. Not far from the visitors centre is an impressive waterfall, near where you can camp (per person US\$3) or overnight in a very basic four-person hut (per person US\$6) – bring your own food, sleeping bag, mattress and stove. Guides (per person US\$3) are available, and pony trekking (per half/full day US\$7/10.50) can be arranged. The reserve sits at just over 3000m and gets cold at night, so come prepared.

Bokong lies roughly midway between Katse and Hlotse at the top of Mafika-Lisiu Pass (3090m). Minibus taxis from Hlotse will drop you at the visitors centre (M15, 1½ hours); when leaving, you may need to wait for a little while before one passes by with space to fit you in.

NORTHERN LESOTHO

TEYATEYANENG

Teyateyaneng ('Place of Quick Sands', or 'TY') has been developed as the craft centre of Lesotho. Some of the best tapestries come from **Helang Basali Crafts** (✉ 2250 0382; ☎ 8am-5pm) at St Agnes Mission, 2km before TY on the Maseru road.

The **Blue Mountain Inn** (✉ 2250 0362; s/d US\$32/39) has cottages and a restaurant.

LERIBE

Leribe (also known as 'Hlotse') is a busy, regional, market hub. It was an administrative centre under the British, as evidenced by a few old buildings slowly decaying in the leafy streets. The main sight is the crumbling **Major Bell's Tower** near the market, a government storehouse (1879).

The **Leribe Craft Centre** (✉ 2240 0323; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1pm Sat) sells a range of high-quality woollen goods. There is a set of **dinosaur footprints** a few kilometres south of Leribe at Tsikoane village. To get there, head north and take the small dirt road to the right at the Tsikoane Primary School, towards some rocky outcrops. Follow it up to the church and ask someone to direct you to the *minwane*, which are inside some caves after a 1km slog up the mountainside.

About 7km north of Leribe are the **Subeng River dinosaur footprints**. At the signpost indicating the river, walk down about 250m to a concrete causeway. The worn footprints of at least three species of dinosaur are about 15m downstream on the right bank.

Leribe Hotel (✉ 2240 0559; Main St; s/d US\$25/39; meals from US\$3.50) echoes olde-world *Fawlty Towers* style with a dining room and tea garden.

LESOTHO DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation prices and standards are on par with the country's rocky passes – high and a occasionally a little rough, although there are a range of comfort standards. The only five-star accommodation can be found in international-style hotels in Maseru. Around the rest of the country, sleeping options range from lodges (the main ones offer comfort-

PRACTICALITIES

- Several newspapers, such as *Southern Star*, are available in Maseru and other towns. Day-old South African newspapers are also available in Maseru.
- Thanks to a transmitter, you can pick up the BBC's World Service on short wave, medium wave (1197kHz) and FM radio.
- Lesotho's electricity is generated at 220V. Appliances have three round prongs as used in South Africa.
- Lesotho uses the metric system.

able rooms of varying standards and prices), to rough-and-tumble hotels and B&Bs. The cheapest and most basic accommodation can be found in missions and Agricultural Training Centres, which are scattered around the country.

ACTIVITIES

The main options in Lesotho are hiking (see boxed text, p872) and pony trekking (see boxed text, p872).

BOOKS

An interesting history book is *A Short History of Lesotho* by Stephen Gill. Poignant Basotho accounts include *Singing Away the Hunger* by Mpho Matsepso Nthunya et al, and *Shepherd Boy of the Maloti* by Thabo Makoa.

CLIMATE

Come prepared. The climate in Lesotho is very changeable: temperatures can plummet to near zero (even during summer), rivers flood, and thick fogs can also delay you. During the dry season, water can be scarce. Bring your own food, sleeping bag, rainwear, sunscreen, warm clothing, a torch and water-purification tablets.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Keep off high ground during electrical storms and avoid camping in the open. In the highlands, school children and herd boys may request 'sweets! sweets!'; responding to this encourages begging.

On the last Friday of the month, when many people are paid and some of them get drunk, things can get boisterous and occasionally aggressive.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Embassies & Consulates in Lesotho

France (✉ 2232 7522) Inquiries handled by Alliance Française in Maseru, but all visas issued in Johannesburg.
Ireland (✉ 2231 4068; Tonakholo Rd, Maseru West)
Netherlands (✉ 2231 2114; Lancer's Inn) Off Kingsway.
South Africa (✉ 2231 5758; 10th fl, Bank of Lesotho Towers, Kingsway)
USA (✉ 2231 2666; 254 Kingsway)

Lesotho Embassies & Consulates

Lesotho has diplomatic representation in South Africa (Pretoria and Johannesburg). Details are listed in the Directory section of those chapters.

HOLIDAYS

As well as religious holidays listed in the main Directory chapter (p1106) the principal public holidays in Lesotho are the following:

- 1 January** New Year's Day
- 11 March** Moshoeshoe Day
- 4 October** Independence Day
- 26 December** Boxing Day

INTERNET ACCESS

At the time of research internet access was available in Maseru only.

MAPS

The **Department of Land, Surveys & Physical Planning** (Lerotholi Rd, Maseru; ✉ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri) sells a good 1:250,000 topographical map of Lesotho (US\$7), plus hiking maps (US\$5) covering the country.

MONEY

The unit of currency is the maloti (M), which is made up of 100 liesente. The maloti is fixed at the value of the South African rand; rands are accepted everywhere but maloti are not accepted back in South Africa. The only foreign-exchange banks (Bank of Lesotho, Nedbank and Standard Bank) are in Maseru.

PHOTOGRAPHY

You're better off bringing film into Lesotho and waiting until you're back home before getting it developed.

POST & TELEPHONE

Post offices are open from 8am to 4.30pm weekdays and 8am to noon Saturday. Delivery is slow and unreliable.

The telephone system works reasonably well. There are no area codes within Lesotho. Lesotho's country code is ✆ 266; to call Lesotho from South Africa dial the prefix ✆ 09 266. To call South Africa from anywhere in Lesotho, dial ✆ 00 27 and then the South African area code and phone number.

VISAS

Citizens of most Western European countries, the USA and most Commonwealth countries are granted a free entry permit at the border. The standard stay permitted is two weeks, although if you ask for longer you may be lucky.

For extensions, visit the **Department of Immigration & Passport Services** (✉ 2232 3771, 2232 1110; PO Box 363, Maseru 100) in Maseru.

Citizens of other countries must pay for single-entry visa (around \$4.50) or multiple-entry visa (around \$7). Pretoria is the place to obtain visas for other African countries.

TRANSPORT IN LESOTHO

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Lesotho's Moshoeshoe International Airport is 21km from Maseru. **South African Airways** (SAA; ✆ 27 11 978 5313) flies daily between Maseru and Johannesburg for around US\$140, one way.

Land

All Lesotho's borders are with South Africa. Crossings are at Maseru Bridge and Ficksburg Bridge (both open 24 hours); Makhaleng Bridge (open 8am to 6pm weekdays, 8am to 4pm on weekends); and Sani Pass (open 8am to 4pm), but these often have long queues; Peka Bridge (8am to 4pm) and Van Rooyen's Gate (8am to 10pm) are less crowded.

A daily minibus taxi travels between Mokhotlong (Lesotho) and Underberg (South Africa) via Sani Pass (see p874); and several taxis daily between Qacha's Nek (Lesotho) and Matatiele (South Africa; about US\$2, 45 minutes).

Big Sky Coaches (www.bigskycoaches.co.za) and **Intercape** (www.intercape.co.za) run daily in each

DEPARTURE TAX

The airport departure tax is US\$4.50.

direction between Bloemfontein and Maseru Bridge (US\$4.70, three hours).

At least three buses run weekly between Jo'burg and Maseru (six to seven hours), and daily minibus taxis between both Jo'burg and Ladybrand (16km from the Maseru Bridge border crossing) and Maseru. Leaving Maseru, you'll need to go to the South Africa side of Maseru Bridge.

GETTING AROUND

A good network of slow, no-frills buses and faster minibus taxis access many towns. These leave when full; no reservations are necessary. You'll be quoted long-distance fares on the buses but it's best to just buy a ticket to the next major town, as you might be stuck waiting for the bus to fill up again, while other buses leave before yours.